

CHAPTER IV.

THE SOCIAL CATAclySM IN GERMANY.

IN the social cataclysm that followed, the influence of such ultra-evangelical views is very apparent. In demanding the redress of his grievances the common man quoted Scripture profusely, appealed to primitive Christianity in justification of his action. It would, however, be shortsighted to ascribe the rising of the German peasants in 1524-25 mainly to the preaching of a Carlstadt or a Miinzer, to regard it as primarily a religious crusade. It was largely social, and only in a lesser degree political or religious in character. Its mainspring lay in the social grievances already noted. It was one more Bundschuh—the last of a series—on a grand scale, though the religious element was intensified as the result of the religious revival. In 1524-25, as in 1502 and 1512, the peasant rose primarily to settle accounts with his oppressors, and, without the practical grievances against which he had long protested, there would have been no serious attempt to realise a theory of Christian socialism as preached by Miinzer and other rabid evangelists.

The movement began at Stuhlingen, in the south-west corner of the Black Forest, of which district the Count of Lupfen was feudal lord. The immediate cause of this local outbreak was prosaic enough. The rustics of Lupfen resolved, according to the chronicler, to strike against the obligation to gather strawberries and snail shells, on holidays, for the noble countess. If so, they merely adduced these among an accumulation of grievances which affected the whole agrarian system, and bore fundamentally on the relation of lord and dependant. The peasant, we learn, is the victim of a situation which has simply made it impossible to live. He is denied justice, and mercilessly mulcted by his lord in a variety of ways. He is deprived of his right to use the common lands